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High-level segment and coordination segment

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 9 July 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

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(a) Assistance in the eradication of poverty and support to vulnerable groups, including assistance during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

CONCLUSION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT WITH THE PRESENTATION OF A SUMMARY BY THE PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT said that he would now present his summary of the main features of the deliberations of the high-level segment. A broad convergence of views appeared to have emerged on several aspects of the theme "Enhancing international cooperation for development: the role of the United Nations system". The current juncture was seen as a defining moment which provided a unique opportunity for strengthening international development cooperation. It had been made clear during the high-level segment that the effectiveness of the United Nations system, which was expected to play a pivotal role in that development cooperation, needed to be enhanced. The objectives of peace, development and justice, mandated by the Charter, were seen as indivisible and equally essential. Development cooperation and the eradication of poverty were regarded as inextricably linked with the preservation of peace and security, and the view had been expressed that the two needed to be pursued with equal vigour and in an integrated manner.

Concern had been expressed about the stalled world economy and the problems of market access, technology, excessive debt burdens, inadequate official development assistance and a generally unfavourable economic environment. It had been stressed that Africa and the least developed countries faced a particularly difficult situation, while income levels in the transition economies of the East were falling sharply and recovery from recession in the developed economies was weak. A concerted effort to reinvigorate growth and development was seen as the first priority. The call had been made for an opening-up of markets through a successful outcome to the Uruguay Round, the easing of the debt burden and an increase in official development assistance, including a real increase in the resources available to the International Development Association. It had been emphasized that

(The President)

special attention must be paid to the problems of the African and least developed countries. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 46/151, represented a commitment to faster African economic and social development.

Some concern had been expressed that the resources released as a result of the reduction in international tension might be diverted from development assistance to support the transition in Eastern Europe and newly independent States. Nevertheless, assurances had been given that resources for development assistance and support for the transition economies would be kept separate. A successful transition and restoration of growth in Eastern European and newly independent States was seen as beneficial to the world economy. Several speakers had highlighted the urgency of international support for political and economic reforms in the region.

Many delegates had referred to an emerging vision of development as human-centred, equitable, and socially and environmentally sustainable, with the eradication of poverty as the priority objective. More effective policy coordination with broad participation was seen as an important means of creating a more favourable economic environment for development. There had also been a call for international support to ensure the success of the economic reforms being pursued in many developing countries. Moreover, the need to integrate social goals into adjustment programmes and development strategies had been stressed. The proposal for a world summit for social development had received broad support. Another element that had been stressed by many speakers was the need for good governance both nationally and internationally. Democratic principles were seen as necessary to sustain both short-term adjustment and long-term development.

Speakers had noted the ongoing restructuring of the United Nations, which should continue, although care should be taken not to redefine the development priorities of developing countries or limit the scope of development cooperation to technical cooperation. The establishment of a new department to strengthen the United Nations system in the field of humanitarian assistance had been welcomed, and many delegations had expressed the view that

(The President)

the establishment of a commission on sustainable development would have an impact on the overall reform of the United Nations role in the economic and social and related fields. There was broad acceptance of the need to review the relationship between and functioning of the various parts of the United Nations system in the economic and social and related fields so as to optimize its effectiveness. The importance of better coordination of United Nations activities in those areas had also been stressed with particular reference to cross-sectoral issues. Moreover, a number of speakers had called for an increased role for the regional commissions.

Speakers had stressed that it was important to ensure adequate and assured resources for operational activities and to preserve the neutrality of United Nations programmes, duly respecting the national priorities of recipient countries. It had been proposed that operational activities should be financed through a combination of assessed, negotiated and voluntary contributions. Much attention had also been paid to the need for a closer and improved relationship between the United Nations and its agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. The role of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) was seen as central in bringing about improved coordination.

He said that he had decided to establish an open-ended ad hoc working group of the Council on the role of the United Nations in enhancing international cooperation for development. The group would develop recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session and appropriate action. In particular, the working group would be guided by the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, the declaration adopted at the eighteenth special session of the General Assembly, the Cartagena Commitment, adopted at the eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the deliberations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The first meeting of the working group to discuss organizational matters would be held before the conclusion of the current session of the Council.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

(a) ASSISTANCE IN THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ASSISTANCE DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES (E/1992/27 and 47)

The PRESIDENT declared open the coordination segment of the Council's current session.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), speaking on a point of order on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the European Community delegations attached great importance to the coordination segment and the manner in which it was organized. The Council had earlier decided that the statements of executive heads of specialized agencies should be circulated in advance, given the importance of the matters under consideration. Regrettably, not a single statement had in fact been made available in advance. He also noted that the list of speakers for the current meeting was very long, which would scarcely help the Council to reach appropriate recommendations. He trusted that in the circumstances the President would make every effort to hold speakers to the time-limit of five minutes determined earlier.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) agreed that the Council did not have time to hear long statements, which in any event, did not foster genuine dialogue.

Mr. MOORE (United States of America) said that he fully endorsed the views stated by the representatives of the United Kingdom and Canada. The emphasis at the coordination segment should be on dialogue, and speakers should make every effort to avoid a succession of unrelated statements.

The PRESIDENT appealed to speakers to respect the five-minute time-limit in delivering their statements.

Mr. JI Chaozhu (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on policies and activities relating to assistance in the eradication of poverty and support to vulnerable groups, including assistance during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (E/1992/47). He said that the phenomenon of poverty had not receded significantly. The central fact was that more than 1 billion people, a quarter of mankind, lived in unacceptable conditions of

(Mr. Ji Chaozhu)

deprivation, and the number was rising rather than falling. Women and children were particularly prone to poverty, especially in rural areas. The brunt of the shocks resulting from falling commodity prices and rising interest rates during the 1980s had fallen on the most vulnerable segments of society. Structural adjustment programmes had also resulted in increased poverty in the short run as social services were cut back.

Those trends had led to a major resurgence of interest in poverty eradication. The major development institutions all accorded high priority to poverty eradication in their assistance programmes, and a determined effort had been made to develop common approaches. A number of inter-agency meetings had been convened to that end, and joint activities were being carried out.

While considerable progress had been made, important gaps remained. There was, for example, no overall policy framework at the level of the system, and no system-wide mechanism for addressing the issue of poverty as a whole. Further work was needed in developing common approaches to data collection and social indicators as a basis for action. In addition, closer collaboration was needed between agencies and programmes so as to incorporate social and poverty eradication components. At the field level, much needed to be done to develop a team approach in cooperation with recipient Governments to make poverty eradication an integrated programme objective.

His trusted that the Council's deliberations would provide the necessary political guidance for the development of a coordinated response and set the stage for a major effort to reduce poverty.

Dr. NAKAJIMA (Director-General, World Health Organization) said that the striking relationship between poverty and health was important to the World Health Organization (WHO). Countries with a per capita GNP of $1,500 and above had a life expectancy at birth of 71 to 78 years and infant mortality rates of 5 to 25 per 1,000 live births; in contrast, countries with per capita GNP between $100 and $499 had a life expectancy at birth as low as 43 years, and infant mortality rates might be as high as 170 per 1,000 live births. However, through judicious use of resources and community participation, some low-income countries had achieved a life expectancy at birth of 71 years and an infant mortality rate of 21 per 1,000 live births.

(Dr. Nakajima, WHO)

A disturbing feature of development strategies was that they contributed to environmental degradation, accentuated poverty in certain vulnerable groups and led to undesirable changes in lifestyles which fostered the spread of many poverty-related diseases; likewise disturbing was the fact that capacity for survival meant adaptation to a poorer quality of life. Even in the developed countries, a growing number of people could not afford access to essential health care.

WHO had long advocated a more dynamic, human-centred approach to development. Its targets relating to the goal of health for all by the year 2000 and to primary health care had been endorsed by the General Assembly. Thus WHO had drawn the world's attention to accessibility and equity in health as a basic human right, and to the contribution health made to peace, stability and prosperity. The lessons learned, inter alia, from monitoring implementation of the Global Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000, and from the need to face the realities of the 1990s squarely, had led WHO to intensify its direct cooperation with countries and peoples in greatest need, including the least developed countries. A country-by-country approach was used, in active partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund and other development agencies. At the same time, national authorities were urged to make a realistic appraisal of health priorities and of available and new resources. WHO was committed to making more efficient use of its own resources, and to mobilizing additional resources to meet countries' priority needs; it had also initiated dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions because of concern that health-sector disbursements in some developing countries had slowed.

The root causes of vulnerability had been focused on at the International Forum on Health, held in December 1991 in Accra, Ghana, which had shown that health and economic objectives could be pursued simultaneously. Efforts to alleviate the particular vulnerability of children and women included the joint follow-up activities of UNICEF and WHO to strengthen immunization coverage of children, and the Safe Motherhood Initiative, a multi-organization activity launched in 1987. One important successful endeavour was the control

(Dr. Nakajima, WHO)

of river blindness in the Volta River basin, in which task WHO had collaborated with the World Bank and others. With regard to the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, he looked forward to the Council's favourable reaction to the measures proposed by WHO in consultation with other organizations in the United Nations system.

Forceful implementation of a strategy focused on human beings would not only promote welfare, and better health in particular, but would enable people to be more productive. In facing the challenge of consolidating and refining efforts and maximizing the scarce resources available for development, WHO would continue to contribute its special expertise.

Mr. HANSENNE (Director-General, International Labour Office) said that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had an explicit mandate to join in the fight against poverty. The end of the cold war provided an opportunity for a fresh look at the United Nations role in that fight; the Council's current discussion was therefore important and timely. That role was necessarily indirect and secondary, since the primary responsibility lay with Governments; where the latter had the will to carry out the necessary reforms, the United Nations system could advise and assist in strengthening national capacity. The approach should be realistic, promoting conditions in which economic and social institutions - free employers' associations and free trade unions in particular - could function effectively, and directing policies towards integrating the poor, the unemployed and the most vulnerable groups into society.

With that approach in mind, ILO was concentrating its contribution on four areas. Firstly, it assisted in the design of policies and programmes to stimulate higher economic growth levels and generate productive employment. Secondly, ILO sought to promote increased access by the poor, especially in the rural and informal sectors, to productive assets, and to enhance their participation in the economy. Thirdly, it encouraged broader social protection through the application of international labour standards, assisted in institutional and infrastructure creation or reform and advised on social security measures. Fourthly, it strongly urged that poverty alleviation should be taken into account in formulating macroeconomic policies, including

(Mr. Hansenne)

those relating to structural adjustment. In that connection, ILO welcomed the statement by the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund to the effect that it was not simply a question of providing social safety nets but rather of recognizing that the social dimension must be at the centre of development issues.

Mr. SAOUMA (Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that the eradication of poverty was one of mankind's challenges on the eve of the third millenium. All countries should act together in promoting sustained economic and social development, focused on human beings. The majority of the world's poor depended on agriculture, forestry and fishing for their subsistence; agriculture, therefore, played a central role in the fight against poverty. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was carrying out a priority programme in that regard, covering aspects such as agriculture and global development, food security, the role of women in development and popular participation.

In a little over 30 years' time the world would have over 3 billion inhabitants; in order to meet their needs, production of food and other agricultural products would have to be doubled. The challenge, therefore, was to find new ways to increase agricultural productivity without depleting natural resources - for example, by developing plant and animal strains which required less land and energy, and by improving poor farmers' production methods so as to conserve resources. For the time being, however, existing techniques must be used, despite criticism about their harmful effects on the environment. Most disquieting was the lack of any sign of a firm approach to the colossal research task required in order to introduce new methods and approaches. Among the latter, biotechnology was a promising sector; but research in that field was carried out mainly by transnational corporations, which concentrated on plant and animal strains for which outlets already existed. The needs of poor countries and poor farmers, therefore, and the question of research priorities, including publicly financed research, must be considered; the Advisory Group for International Agricultural Research could play an essential role in that regard. National research efforts, too, should be given the necessary support.

(Mr. Saouma, FAO)

The resources needed for poverty eradication far exceeded the poor countries' means. In order to reduce their external indebtedness, new approaches were required, and, as a matter of the utmost urgency, official development assistance must be brought up to the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP. A lasting solution, however, depended on an improved international trading system, including increased commodity prices, better terms of trade and access to the industrialized countries' markets. The United Nations had an essential role in that regard, and efforts to enhance system-wide cooperation should focus, as a matter of priority, on improving cooperation between the specialized agencies and the World Bank in the fight against poverty. It was likewise essential to coordinate the development assistance provided by bilateral aid agencies.

One specific area in which such cooperation could be strengthened was the campaign against trypanosomiasis; over 10 million square kilometres of fertile land in 37 sub-Saharan countries were affected by that disease. Although environmentally safe techniques existed to control the vectors, less than 2 per cent of the infested area had been treated, owing to lack of resources, and FAO's efforts could not succeed unless the World Bank launched an adequately funded campaign; FAO was ready to collaborate fully in that regard. Another area was the financing of activities to combat poverty under the Global Environment Facility. If programmes to protect the environment were to succeed, rural poverty must be tackled; the Facility's scope must be broadened, as a matter of urgency, for that purpose.

With regard to coordination, the existing inter-agency mechanisms must be strengthened. One of those, the ACC Task Force on Rural Development, was a valuable system-wide coordination mechanism for the task of eliminating rural poverty. The Council should reaffirm the importance of that body and encourage the strengthening of its activities. It was important that Member States strengthened the United Nations system as a whole in the common fight against poverty, which affected almost one sixth of mankind.

Mr. EDGREN (Assistant Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that human development was the primary objective of all UNDP's efforts. The real aim of poverty alleviation was to improve people's lives in

(Mr. Edgren)

terms not only of income but of health, education opportunities, leisure, and political and economic freedom - all of which called for national policies. Experience showed that programmes to alleviate poverty should follow three paths: a growth pattern conducive to equitable distribution of income and assets; well-targeted social policies; and support for local institutions and organizations, UNDP's approach was to help recipient countries build up their capacity to identify, design and implement poverty alleviation activities. It emphasized policy concerns such as relationships between macropolicy framework and poverty, access by the poor to resources, and the various social services, structures and institutions which could foster wider participation. Those policy concerns were now being shared among several agencies and bodies in the United Nations system, although greater coordination was required. The various joint activities being undertaken included efforts designed to support vulnerable groups during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes and to measure those programmes' social impact.

Four starting points, in which greater coordination would be mutually beneficial, might be considered. The first was the analysis of poverty processes. The second was the incorporation of people in development planning. The third was the exploration of ways and means to incorporate poverty alleviation concerns in the policy dialogue. The fourth was coordination in data collection and analysis, including an appraisal of the use of existing relevant data in the various agencies.

With regard to operational activities, UNDP had made significant efforts to coordinate policies and field activities with other agencies and partners in mobilizing funds and providing technical expertise and information. Recently, UNDP had participated in poverty-alleviation joint formulation missions, with its partners in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in a few pilot countries in Africa; similar initiatives were being taken in other countries and regions. It had also collaborated with the World Bank in the context of the Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme in Africa, and planned to expand collaboration with other agencies in the next phase of that task.

(Mr. Edgren)

UNDP would continue to foster coordination in the United Nations development system in supporting the developing countries' efforts to eradicate poverty, and to review and amend its programme policies and strategies as experience dictated.

Mr. JOLLY (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) drew the Council's attention to the increasingly pessimistic forecasts regarding poverty, which showed an increase in virtually every region of the world. In the light of that deteriorating situation, he would like to propose the following key points for practical action. The United Nations should review its objectives and commitments for the 1990s and consider how they might be given greater priority within the framework of revitalization and restructuring of the Organization as a whole. The Council could play a critical role in stimulating that review and in monitoring progress. In that collective effort the Bretton Woods institutions must play a supportive role, which was not, unfortunately, so far reflected in activities at the country level.

In all countries where Governments requested assistance, a strategy document focusing on international support for poverty eradication should be prepared, with the cooperation of all the operational agencies of the United Nations, and under the leadership of the resident coordinator in the country concerned and in close liaison with the Government itself.

Support from the regional commissions in those efforts would also be essential. One of the features of development in recent years had been a growing differentiation in the pattern and prospects of development in various regions, and the regional commissions should play an increasing role in enabling the United Nations system to move from global perspectives to national and regional realities.

Africa and the least developed countries in other regions of the world needed to receive special attention and support, on the lines indicated by the Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

Monitoring was crucial. The United Nations Statistical Office should be in the forefront in providing guidelines and support for monitoring poverty eradication and human development world wide.

(Mr. Jolly)

The renewed focus on poverty eradication needed to be complemented and supported by an increase in and a restructuring of aid among donors. UNDP recommended that the proportion of bilateral aid going to human development should be increased to 20 per cent over the 1990s.

At the current session, the Economic and Social Council had before it an opportunity to provide governance and management oversight for a major initiative which would have a critical impact on the question of poverty: the Council's review of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 45/217 on the World Summit for Children (E/1992/71) would provide an impetus for progress in that crucial effort.

Action in respect of those key points would go far towards the eradication of poverty in the 1990s, and would restore the vision and commitments embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, in addition to laying a firmer foundation for the process of peace-building.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) stressed the overriding need for Governments, agencies and non-governmental organizations to work together in a cooperative manner in the service of the poor. The World Food Programme (WFP) was the primary distributor of multilateral food aid in the world, but food alone could not eliminate poverty and it was therefore vital for WFP efforts to be closely coordinated with those of other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, working together with the Governments of developing countries to help them achieve the goal of self-reliance.

She agreed with the Secretary-General that sustained economic development was the appropriate solution to poverty. In the short to medium term, however, the poor needed help with food and other basic necessities, while a social safety net was necessary for the most vulnerable groups, especially female-headed households, which represented the highest proportion of poor families.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic had become a major global socio-economic problem, particularly in Africa, aggravating poverty, child dependency and the problem of orphans. Coordinated action was needed to increase the impact of

(Ms. Bertini)

individual programmes in creating awareness and providing support and treatment for those infected.

The poor had also borne the brunt of the dramatic increase in natural and man-made disasters in recent years, and she welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to enhance coordination through the establishment of a Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Emergencies currently accounted for over half of WFP operational activities, compared to one third in the past. Emergency assistance was vital but the resources used must be in addition to those necessary to support long-term development efforts to eradicate poverty. Significantly increased resources for development were therefore required.

She welcomed the Secretary-General's strong commitment to coordination in the field, as expressed in his statement to the high-level segment, and stressed that appropriate structural changes were needed to achieve such coordination. One of the major problems was the complexity of the system, where the poor had to deal with many sources of assistance, all with different rules, procedures, offices and bureaucracies. Surely development organizations sharing the same overriding goal could be brought under the same United Nations management, developing compatible programmes in concert with host Governments. Such an approach could work only through the involvement of all operational development agencies working in the field on behalf of the poor.

Mr. SEZAKI (Japan) said that nearly all economic assistance, both multilateral and bilateral, was geared to the alleviation of poverty. In many cases, the adverse effects of structural adjustment policies had been felt most keenly by the poor and a social safety net was needed. Over 600 million people were living in extreme poverty, two thirds of them in Asia, while the situation in sub-Saharan Africa was also critical. The number of women living in poverty had risen dramatically in the past 20 years, and an appropriate policy was needed to address their plight. Poverty was deeply rooted in inequality and injustice, with particular regard to income and land distribution. It was therefore vital that policies to eradicate poverty should take full account of the various economic and social factors which had created, aggravated, and sustained it, notably the inequitable allocation of

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

available resources nationally, including the level of military expenditure, and the lack of proper rural development policies. Clearly, national poverty policies were the responsibility of Governments, but, unless such policies were pursued with determination, little could be achieved through international assistance.

Turning to the report of the Secretary-General (E/1992/47), he welcomed the role played by ACC in coordinating the United Nations system through its Task Force on Rural Development, as well as the initiative by JCGP, which was collaborating to combat poverty in five selected developing countries. He also commended the work of the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational), which had invited its members to consider the need for inter-Secretariat action at headquarters level to develop common strategies. He wondered whether any steps had been taken to follow up that initiative. The report had also called for an overall system-wide anti-poverty strategy, but the steps taken so far had been rather isolated and limited in scope.

With regard to government-level coordination, the United Nations could play an important role in helping in national policy formulation by making its expertise and knowledge available, through round tables and consultative groups, so as to foster dialogue among development partners and ensure a coherent approach. Extensive dialogue between Governments and the relevant United Nations bodies was crucial in establishing a basis for improved coordination.

With regard to coordination in the field, it was at the country level that the United Nations system could have the greatest impact. It was only at the field level that dialogue with Governments could take place and programmes could be formulated to meet specific needs. In that connection, the role of the resident coordinator should be strengthened and a genuine joint programming exercise organized involving United Nations agencies and Governments.

With regard to agency coordination at headquarters level, a methodology was required in order to respond to the needs of developing countries in a coherent and effective manner. Because the issue of poverty eradication was so broad, covering health, food, water, population and education, virtually

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

every agency in the United Nations system was involved. A systematic approach was therefore required, and United Nations bodies needed to engage in intensive discussions on matters such as the collection of information, the formulation of a methodology for translating data into country-specific policies, a method of coordinating programmes and a clear division of labour.

He agreed with the report that information sharing, data collection and situation analysis were important for that purpose, but felt that there was substantial duplication of work among agencies and that greater coordination was needed to produce a country-specific approach, with more discussion at headquarters level on how data could be used and assessed to achieve that end.

There was also a need for improved coordination between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the World Bank, which should make better use of the expertise and experience of bodies such as UNDP, particularly at the country level.

Mr. GARELIK (Russian Federation) said that all countries, both developing and developed, were confronted with the problem of poverty. The proposals and recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his report (E/1992/47) enjoyed wide support, and the delegation of the Russian Federation agreed with the conclusion that underdevelopment and population growth were interrelated issues which could be addressed only by macroeconomic policies which aimed at achieving financial stabilization without losing sight of social priorities. In that context, the end of the "cold war" could only be regarded as a welcome development. The United Nations, and the Economic and Social Council in particular, must enhance its catalytic role in development, taking into account the social factors involved in restructuring. It was essential both to dispense with redundant programmes and to make sure that available resources were used to best effect. In the context of that endeavour, his delegation particularly welcomed the proposal to convene a world summit meeting, with a clearly defined agenda, to discuss issues relating to social development.

There was clearly a need for a thoroughgoing analysis of the needs of each individual country, to which not only the regional commissions, but also international financial institutions and the specialized agencies could make

(Mr. Garelik, Russian Federation)

their contributions. It might also be timely to seek alternative, non-governmental, financing for projects.

Mr. MARKER (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/47) had revealed the grave fact that more than 1.1 billion people in the world were considered to be living in poverty. Of the world population considered to be extremely poor, two thirds lived in Asia, while in sub-Saharan Africa a population of some 120 million lived largely in areas where soils were poor and farming techniques underdeveloped. Those alarming figures underscored the need for concerted global action, for which the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade provided a broad framework.

The adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes in many developing countries, including his own, were felt particularly in the social infrastructure and services, and there was clearly a greater need for programmes to mitigate their impact. It was against that background that better coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system had acquired the utmost importance, and his delegation strongly endorsed the view that there was an imperative need to develop a coherent system-wide framework for action in the area of poverty eradication. Such a commitment would inevitably entail additional financial resources and the elimination of current inequities in the global monetary, financial and trade systems.

Mr. SERRATE-CUELLAR (Observer for Bolivia) said that the countries of the North were finally realizing that poverty was of concern to all countries, both developing and developed. The new awareness of a global dimension, evident most recently in Rio, had brought sharply into focus not only the risks to the environment and to the cultural heritage of mankind, but also the serious deterioration in living conditions, particularly in the developing countries. In that context, determining the course of cooperation could no longer be the sole preserve of those with resources, but must be a joint effort by all nations.

(Mr. Serrate-Cuéllar, Observer, Bolivia)

Bolivia, which had contributed to the formulation of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, believed that it was now important to assess what progress had been made and whether the undertakings given had been met.

As the Secretary-General had indicated, there was no overall system-wide anti-poverty strategy, with the result that the most vulnerable groups were still suffering, while discussions on procedure, tactics or organization continued.

Among the most vulnerable groups were the indigenous peoples, whose welfare was of particular concern to his own country. In that connection, he stressed the importance of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention and the work of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. In addition, in its resolution 45/164, the General Assembly had proclaimed 1993 as International Year for the World's Indigenous People, while the Governments of Latin American countries had recently agreed in Madrid to set up a fund for the development of Latin American and Caribbean indigenous peoples.

In his own country, legislation had been adopted targeting specific groups. In addition, the fifth country programme for Bolivia adopted by the UNDP Governing Council had been designated a national coordinating instrument.

Lastly, he stressed that the concept of sustainable development was a vital point of departure and, in that connection, endorsed the call for a world summit for social development to be held.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that a number of obstacles must be overcome if the problem of poverty was to be tackled effectively. Firstly, economic policies which impeded growth and discriminated against the poor must be abandoned; secondly, political, legal, social and racial discrimination must be eliminated; and lastly, human and financial capital constraints must be eliminated. If those objectives were to be achieved, the Governments of all countries must accept that they bore the prime responsibility for establishing a public policy to reduce poverty. Each Government would have to determine how best to pursue that goal, while ensuring that all citizens were in a position to participate in, and benefit from, the development process.

(Mr. Malone, Canada)

Government policy should focus particularly on improving basic health and education services, especially in rural areas, and on improving technology and services to small-scale producers, including women. Although Governments should be responsible for establishing the policy framework, they should allow non-governmental organizations, cooperatives and individuals to participate creatively in the process of poverty-alleviation. The private sector must be allowed and encouraged to operate at all levels, that being the sector which created employment. It should be pointed out that failure to enhance the economic role of women did much to perpetuate low rates of economic growth, poverty, ignorance, child mortality and rapid population growth. Investment in education for women would do much to enhance their long-term economic prospects, and was therefore critical for the survival of society as a whole.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that it would be useful if representatives who had spoken in the high-level segment could make their views available to delegations in summary form, in order to ensure that action-oriented recommendations could emerge from the discussions.

Mr. PAULINICH (Peru) said that he welcomed the suggestion of the representative of the United Kingdom, since there was an evident need to identify specific areas in which coordination could be improved.

Mr. AVALLE (Argentina) and Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that they also agreed with the suggestion made by the representative of the United Kingdom.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 9 July 1992, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. TRAXLER (Italy)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme:

(a) Assistance in the eradication of poverty and support to vulnerable groups, including assistance during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (continued)

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Traxler (Italy), Vice-President, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME:

(a) ASSISTANCE IN THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ASSISTANCE DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES (continued) (E/1992/47)

The PRESIDENT said that, to assist delegations in focusing their debate, the secretariat had prepared a list of priority issues of coordination in the area of poverty eradication. At the Headquarters level those were: first, the need to develop a system-wide agreed approach, or strategy for poverty eradication and a mechanism for coordination; second, the need for closer consultation and cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and the other agencies in the design, sequencing and implementation of structural adjustment programmes, in order to incorporate poverty-eradication goals in those programmes; third, a review by each agency of its poverty-eradication objectives and commitments in the 1990s to give them renewed priority; fourth, the need to develop common approaches to data collection and the development and use of social indicators; fifth, the necessary actions for effective follow-up and implementation of agreed conclusions and goals at high-level inter-agency meetings, such as those in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), the high-level meeting on poverty alleviation and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank seminars, and the need to monitor progress achieved; sixth, the necessary actions to mitigate the inadequacy of resources and to enhance efficiency and effectiveness; and seventh, the necessary actions to achieve better sharing and allocation of responsibilities among various agencies.

(The President)

Priority issues at the country level comprised: first, the need to develop a common country-specific anti-poverty strategy and the harmonization of programmes within that common framework; second, the need to strengthen the leadership role of the resident coordinators on the basis of a team approach to poverty eradication; third, the need to develop closer and complementary collaboration between agencies and the regional commissions; fourth, the need to develop operational linkages between country-specific anti-poverty strategy and sectoral programmes and projects in that country; fifth, coordination with Governments and, where required, the provision of coordinated assistance to enhance the institutional capacity of the Government to establish a well-coordinated anti-poverty strategy and to relate sectoral programmes and projects to that strategy; and sixth, the necessary actions to develop cooperation and complementarity with bilateral donors, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the field.

Mr. DADZIE (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) said that one essential component of an effective strategy to fight poverty was the pursuit of patterns of growth which ensured the productive use of the assets, especially the labour, of the poor. In addition, the capacity of the poor to take advantage of employment opportunities must be enhanced, through the provision of basic social services and well-targeted transfers, and safety nets must be established for those who were unable to benefit from those processes or were particularly vulnerable to shocks and the severe impact of structural adjustment.

While domestic policy was crucial to the alleviation of poverty, international assistance was essential to support national efforts, and UNCTAD believed that, given the necessary political commitment of Governments, the task of containing and even reducing the numbers of the poor by the end of the 1990s was feasible. The attainment of that goal would largely depend, however, on the contribution of the United Nations system.

The Cartagena Conference had committed all States to work together in a new international partnership for development to erase the scourge of poverty and deprivation in the developing world, and it had established a new UNCTAD Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation, which would provide an important

(Mr. Dadzie)

forum for the exchange of experience and the promotion of international consensus on principles and strategies for action in that area. The Committee would review existing information and analyses on poverty issues, drawing on the valuable work already accomplished by the United Nations system, and would then proceed to a focused and integrated review of national policies at the country level, including an assessment of the impact of structural adjustment programmes on poverty alleviation.

The third broad area of its work would be the examination of poverty-related sectoral issues, including official development assistance, social development programmes, the impact of trade expansion and the relationship between demographic factors, such as migration and poverty alleviation, and complementary international support measures. The Standing Committee would also explore the linkages between the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development and would be guided by the need to assist the Council and the General Assembly in their overall policy and coordination responsibilities. The Committee's work would be based on high-quality analysis, conducted in full consultation with the other organizations of the system, drawing on their own technical work and that of other bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), academic institutions and non-governmental organizations in the area of poverty.

Finally, he said that UNCTAD set great store by consultation, concertation and cooperation in its new tasks and would welcome any guidance from the Council with a view to an integrated, coherent and global approach to the eradication of poverty and the role of UNCTAD in that endeavour.

Mr. AHMED (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) said that, with a total of 3.1 billion people in 1990, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the world's population. About 800 million people in the ESCAP region, approximately three quarters of the world's poor, lived in conditions of absolute poverty. The situation was further exacerbated by large-scale migration, a consequence of increased urbanization, which caused rural poverty to be transferred to the urban area and created more stresses.

(Mr. Ahmed)

In Asia, poverty was intrinsically linked with lack of education, particularly among the female population in South Asia, where female illiteracy rates ranged as high as 90 per cent in some countries. Prominent among the causes of poverty in the Asian and Pacific region was population growth, and while many countries had successfully limited their population growth rates, their sheer size made any increments to their populations a matter of great concern. Children below the age of 14 constituted more than 40 per cent of the population of many countries in the region, with alarming implications for the poverty situation and its perpetuation in the future, particularly since a high proportion of those children would remain illiterate.

Despite impressive economic growth in several countries over the previous two decades, the poverty problem remained intractable throughout the region and, in its disadvantaged countries, was seriously aggravated by economic stagnation. At the political level, poverty was a serious destabilizing factor and could endanger the generally peaceful nature of development in the region.

He described various innovative poverty-alleviation programmes which had been implemented in the region, often with considerable success. Those programmes were part of a general ESCAP policy to encourage a mutually beneficial exchange of experience among member States, enabling countries to develop new strategies on the lines of those which had proved successful elsewhere.

Poverty in Asia was an aggravating factor in many other economic and social ills, such as environmental degradation, crime, drug abuse and prostitution. With a population growth rate of approximately 1.9 per cent, 60 million people were being added to the region every year, with potentially disastrous consequences unless more intensive efforts were made to break the back of poverty. At the Commission's forty-eighth session in Beijing in April 1992, the issue of poverty alleviation had been given priority attention and, as part of the Commission's rationalization of its programme orientation, it had set up a new thematic committee on poverty alleviation to address the problem on a regional level, just as the new UNCTAD Committee on Poverty Alleviation would at a global level. At its forty-seventh session in 1991,

(Mr. Ahmed)

ESCAP had adopted a resolution on regional support for the alleviation of poverty, which put forward the idea of a ministerial meeting in 1994 on poverty alleviation. Consequently, there could be a major regional conference on the issue in the ESCAP region in 1994.

Lack of resources placed a major constraint on efforts to meet the needs of the developing countries in the region. Regional coordination had focused to date on the alleviation of rural poverty, with the establishment in Bangkok in 1977 of the Inter-Agency Committee on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific. The Inter-Agency Committee had been concerned with the gathering and dissemination of information and with the promotion of participatory rural development, off-farm and on-farm employment strategies and integrated area development. He was confident that in due course the scope of inter-agency coordination could be expanded beyond rural poverty to encompass all activities involved in meeting the challenge of poverty alleviation in Asia.

Mrs. SADIK (United Nations Population Fund) said that the population of the developing world would increase by an additional 900 million during the 1990s, placing a constantly increasing burden on health, education, employment, housing and related services and leading to a proportionate increase in the number of poor, predominantly women and children. In its turn, the increasingly serious problem of migration was due to a combination of poverty and population pressures. The links between population factors and economic development had been demonstrated in the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) publication The State of World Population 1992, which had shown that countries with slower population growth were better able to sustain economic performance.

The eradication of poverty would liberate a vital resource for national development and it was therefore essential, through integrated and well-coordinated efforts, to ensure that development programmes reached the poor and to offset the negative consequences of structural adjustment programmes, particularly on women and children. Efforts already made towards that goal included the multisectoral Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme, in which the World Bank, UNDP and UNFPA all participated,

(Mrs. Sadik)

country-level consultations involving the World Bank and IMF to ensure that family-planning and population programmes were not affected by their structural adjustment programmes, and other initiatives carried out within the context of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP).

Development resources were limited and should therefore be carefully targeted to achieve maximum impact. Investment in women's training, extension services and credit, in health care and family planning, in education and in human-resource development were all effective development strategies. While investment in social development was highly cost-effective, it was not an alternative to other forms of investment and would only pay off in the context of a growing economy. For that reason it was essential to generate new resources for development.

The human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic currently affected an estimated 10 to 12 million people world wide and while the pandemic was not expected to have a major impact on population growth rates in the short or medium term, UNFPA continued to finance studies of its demographic impact and believed that it rendered even more crucial increased investment in family-planning programmes, which could offer a range of AIDS-prevention and control activities.

At the country level, an integrated, multisectoral and well-coordinated approach, involving a true partnership between Governments, agencies and non-governmental organizations, was essential. UNFPA would continue to cooperate closely with the United Nations family in order to establish such a mechanism and therefore supported the holding of a world summit for social development in 1995, as an excellent opportunity for more coordinated and sustained action.

Attacking the social roots of poverty - illiteracy, poor health and the subordination of women - was an essential task of development in the 1990s, leading to economic health, slower population growth and the protection of the environment, and would help create the balance necessary to guarantee development, not merely survival, in the twenty-first century.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) said that poverty was an infinitely complex and intractable problem so that it was very hard to offer generally valid approaches for its elimination. Despite its complexity and the wide range of possible approaches, a number of idées-forces underlay the ECLAC secretariat's thinking on that problem, for instance the idea that economic growth was a prerequisite for reducing poverty. It would continue to lend its support, in the area of analysis and policy design, to the fight against poverty, while supporting operational activities valuable to those who formulated and carried out public policy. Thus, it had collaborated with UNDP and the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation of Chile in organizing the Third Regional Conference on Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Santiago, Chile, in late 1992.

Similarly, a number of United Nations agencies had, in the previous two years, launched joint activities with the Latin American Economic System (SELA) in the area of social policy. The ECLAC secretariat had acted as a focal point in that joint effort. The ECLAC system was also operating, with the Organization of American States, a joint programme on social policies for Latin America and the Caribbean whose central objective was to rationalize public social spending by developing ways of evaluating the cost-effectiveness of social projects whose benefits were hard to quantify in monetary terms.

Finally, ECLAC had prepared the basic document for the third meeting of organizations on proposals for integrated social policies vis-à-vis macroeconomic adjustments in the Latin American and Caribbean region, held recently in Caracas, which had reached a number of agreements on joint activities in the field of social policy.

Mr. DIALLO (Economic Commission for Africa) said that nowhere was the impact of poverty so devastating and degrading as in Africa. Nearly half of the African people lived in abject poverty; still more lacked public health services and even safe water. Worse, the number of poor in Africa was projected to increase by more than 100 million by the year 2000, while a decrease of 400 million was forecast world wide. Africa would then account for more than 30 per cent of all the poor in the developing world, as compared to 16 per cent in 1985. At the same time, famine, war and civil strife had

(Mr. Diallo)

continued unabated, making tens of millions of Africans refugees and displaced persons. That situation was staggering and unacceptable, and showed that the eradication of poverty must assume a cardinal place in Africa's development strategies and economic-reform programmes.

Poverty could only be eliminated if economic growth could be accelerated, sustained and made to benefit the masses of the poor, who must be given access to the means of production and made productive; they, and the people at large, must generate development through genuine democratic participation; and a balance must be struck between population growth, economic growth and environmental protection.

The 1980s had been called Africa's "lost decade", so disappointing had African countries' economic performance been, and the previous three years' record had been no better: gross domestic product had grown at no more than 2.6 per cent, representing a decline in average per capita income.

The severe drought in eastern and southern Africa was a reminder of how fragile the African economy was. The continuing conflicts, too, showed that Africa's economic, social and political fortunes were intimately intertwined.

The malaise of the African economy would be cured, poverty eliminated and standards of living improved only if African countries could restructure their economies in such a way as to achieve sustained and environmentally sustainable growth and development. Poverty would not be eradicated if measures were piecemeal or skirted the real issues. The eradication of poverty must be at the heart of any development strategy or reform programme.

Paradoxically, the implementation of reform and structural adjustment programmes by many African countries had hurt the vulnerable groups and had had visible adverse social impact; such programmes needed to be made human-centred and embedded in strategies for long-term development and transformation. There was a growing consensus to that effect; what remained was to translate that consensus into action.

In December 1991, the General Assembly had adopted the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, which embodied the international consensus on the actions that African countries had undertaken to implement during that decade to achieve sustained and sustainable

(Mr. Diallo)

development. Issues related to the eradication of poverty, structural transformation and adjustment lay at the heart of the New Agenda, and it provided the best framework for the coordination of Africa-related policies and activities of the United Nations system, which should be harmonized among the various agencies at the country level. Such harmonization must arise from Africa's own development strategies, and should also apply to the activities of the United Nations system in support of poverty eradication and vulnerable groups. From the very beginning, considerations of poverty alleviation and sustainable development must be made part and parcel of development and of economic reform and structural adjustment programmes.

Mr. JABER (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) said that armed conflicts and their aftermath had forced an ever-increasing number of people into poverty and brought a deterioration in social conditions that would be felt for a long time to come, affecting all segments of the population but especially disadvantaged groups. With those conditions in mind the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) had undertaken a number of studies to assess the impact of the Gulf crisis, with its massive return of labour from the Gulf and Iraq, on several countries in the region.

In order to cope with the financial and economic imbalances, several countries had been pursuing adjustment policies, including reduction of subsidies and other public expenditures, that could be quite harmful to disadvantaged groups. A number of studies were to be done of such policies and their impact in various ESCWA countries, including Jordan and Egypt, and would be discussed at an expert group meeting in 1993 with a view to formulating policies to reduce the negative social and economic impact of adjustment policies in the countries of the region.

ESCWA had undertaken a number of activities focused on alleviating poverty in those countries, including several to assist vulnerable segments of society, particularly poor women, the disabled and elderly persons. New efforts included activities directed at drug addiction, one of the social ailments associated with poverty.

An assessment of the impact of the Gulf crisis on women returnees and their families was planned; not only had such families lost their income, but

(Mr. Jaber)

their social support system had also been disrupted. There was a need to evaluate the social, educational, health and employment problems facing the displaced populations as they attempted to reorganize their lives.

In undertaking the activities described, ESCWA would attempt to cooperate closely with its sister organizations within the United Nations system; given the lack of resources available to combat mass poverty, a coordinated approach was very much needed.

Mr. URZUA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the programme of UNESCO was built on the premise that development would be sustainable only if human development, equity and respect for natural ecosystems were sought through continuous strengthening of democratic processes. UNESCO was, accordingly, conducting activities in cooperation with member States aimed at reducing extreme poverty, including assistance to Governments during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, with particular emphasis on education.

UNESCO had organized, with the International Labour Organisation, an inter-agency task force on austerity, adjustment and human resources, and had held informal meetings with other United Nations and international organs active in Latin America on integrated social policies and structural adjustments for the region. Such informal meetings had made it possible to coordinate the activities of all participants related to structural adjustment, while defining a series of joint activities for the future.

There was a need for new activities involving the people in the solution of the social problems collectively affecting them. Conscious of that, UNESCO had been collaborating with member States, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in their efforts to mobilize the urban poor to participate in solving infrastructural and social problems affecting urban areas. The role of women as agents of change and how families were coping with their problems were two important issues being looked at.

High rates of population growth in most of the least developed countries and their still limited use of family planning, as well as the urban explosion affecting all of them, hampered efforts to reduce poverty and achieve

(Mr. Urzua, UNESCO)

sustainable development; success would depend on lower population growth, smaller differences in family size between poor and less poor, and a more balanced population distribution.

The crucial non-economic factor in making such efforts successful was human-resource development through the transfer and exchange of knowledge and through information, education and communication programmes. The World Declaration on Education for All included among the means to meet basic learning needs not just formal and informal education programmes, but also all available instruments and sources of information, communication and social action. The strengthening of communication capacities and infrastructures in the developing countries, to which UNESCO was devoting considerable effort, thus became another weapon in the fight against poverty.

That fight would not be won, and development would not become sustainable, if the gap in scientific and technical knowledge between the developed and developing countries continued to grow. Therefore, UNESCO was implementing programmes aimed at strengthening the capacities of the least developed countries in university education in the basic and engineering sciences as well as promoting scientific and technical research.

Practically all the activities he had mentioned were being conducted in collaboration with other agencies; however, no system-wide mechanism for coordinating anti-poverty activities had yet been established. UNESCO supported the Secretary-General's suggestion for a high-level inter-agency meeting to arrive at a common understanding of and approach to a set of social indicators for data collection on poverty and related issues.

Ms. SHELLEY (World Meteorological Organization) said that her organization defined poverty as a serious lack of one or more of the basics of life: air, water, food, sanitation, good health and shelter. Poverty was multifaceted and must be addressed in a multifaceted way. In the struggle to obtain the basics of life, long-term effects were often overlooked for the sake of short-term relief, and people caught in the throes of poverty were unlikely to be able to rectify their own situation. The search for food and water and the struggle for survival in the aftermath of such natural disasters

(Ms. Shelley, WMO)

as floods and drought were possibly the worst context for rational, systematic efforts to relieve poverty. Leadership and vision were needed if the United Nations was to make a lasting impact.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) believed that routine analysis and prediction of the amounts of water available would help to determine what controls were needed so as to avert critical shortages and unsanitary conditions in the future. Again, decisions on what crops to plant, when to plant and when to harvest would be easier if seasonal forecasts of rainfall amounts were available. Poverty could to some extent be alleviated if there existed a study of each country's potential for growing food and raising livestock, taking into account climate, soil and cultural characteristics. A switch to renewable energy sources, especially for routine uses such as solar cookers, would slow environmental degradation and thereby alleviate poverty. Finally, accurate long-term predictions of climate change would help determine sustainable policies and help planners to achieve cost-effectiveness in the near and long term.

WMO's research showed that one of the greatest threats of global warming would be increased weather fluctuations such as the droughts and flooding caused by El Niño and the Southern Oscillation, which had been one cause of the drought in Africa in 1992, the worst in living memory. Indeed, in January 1992 WMO had issued an El Niño advisory.

Those threats were being faced at a time when, owing to the constraints of national economies, many weather- and water-observation systems were poorly equipped and in need of trained staff. With the new spirit of cooperation among the agencies, perhaps those facilities could be put to use again to help the poorest, those who lived on the land and needed to know about the weather so that they could optimize their natural resources. WMO, with the Council's help, stood ready to assist them.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that it was a disgrace to humanity that more than 1 billion people were living in absolute poverty in 1992.

He agreed with the Secretary-General that coordination of efforts to combat poverty should be understood as a means of working together towards

(Mr. Barnett, United Kingdom)

common goals with the aim of ensuring that the United Nations functioned as a system that was more than the sum of its parts. However, the individual entities of the system should not be allowed to proceed with their own mandates and priorities irrespective of the wider responsibilities of the system as a whole or of Member States. Moreover, poverty must not be viewed as an isolated issue; poverty alleviation clearly was at the heart of development.

It was encouraging to note the growing agreement within the system on the broad approaches and strategies to be pursued for the alleviation and eradication of poverty and in the design and implementation of structural adjustment programmes. The members of the European Community were particularly supportive of efforts to prevent the burdens imposed by structural adjustment programmes from falling disproportionately on the poorest groups in society.

He welcomed cooperation between the entities of the United Nations system in such bodies as the ACC Task Force on Rural Development and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP). There was a clear need for a mechanism to address poverty on a system-wide basis. ACC should urgently consider that question and either assume the responsibility itself or identify a suitable mechanism at an appropriately senior level. He would welcome the views of the agencies on the best internal forum for ensuring genuine inter-agency coordination, as well as on the suggestion to appoint poverty coordinators in each United Nations agency and fund.

Member States also had an important responsibility to ensure that the guidance provided through the agencies' governing bodies was consistent with a coordinated strategy to fight poverty. Coordination at the field level was imperative, and the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/47) rightly stressed the need to formulate, in close cooperation with recipient Governments, integrated programmes of action to ensure an effective United Nations system response to country-specific needs. The report also correctly underscored the importance of strengthening the role of the resident coordinator, adopting a multilateral team approach under his leadership and improving the harmonization of United Nations programmes with those of recipient countries.

(Mr. Barnett, United Kingdom)

Those proposals had been endorsed in General Assembly resolution 44/211. However, there had been few results, and the views of the agencies on how to overcome the barriers to achieving those goals would be welcome.

Lastly, he said that both at Headquarters and in the field, a crucial benchmark in assessing the effectiveness of United Nations efforts to combat poverty should be the degree to which they contributed to human development.

Mr. WU Hailong (China) highlighted various problems which had plagued the developing countries since the early 1980s. The United Nations, faced with a world in which one fifth of the population lived in poverty, had made the eradication of poverty a top priority in the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade.

Although some progress had been made, the agencies in the United Nations system lacked a coherent policy. Also lacking was a general mechanism to coordinate the activities of the various components of the United Nations system. The ACC Task Force on Rural Development, its Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational) (CCSQ) (OPS) and JCGP had limited terms of reference and thus could only play a modest role.

His delegation recommended that, in order to enable the agencies to carry out their work in a concerted manner, the United Nations system should establish a system-wide framework inspired by the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade. Furthermore, a designated body should be charged with overall coordination of poverty eradication. To avoid the proliferation of new bodies, consideration should be given to assigning the task to ACC or to expanding the mandate of its Task Force on Rural Development.

It was also important to strengthen coordination between resident coordinators and recipient countries and formulate programmes and projects which were consistent with the priorities of the recipient countries, thereby maximizing the impact of limited resources. It was also necessary to strengthen coordination at the national level, and the proposal that each agency should designate a coordinator as a contact on poverty issues merited consideration.

Mr. HUSLID (Observer for Norway) said it was appropriate that poverty had been singled out for discussion in the coordination segment of the session, since in many poor countries poverty was the main obstacle to human progress and improvement of the environment. Poverty eradication was a multidimensional task requiring a broad approach that simultaneously emphasized many factors, including increased production, structural change, improved productivity, education and training, health services, real popular participation and accountable government. Special corrective measures were needed in order to prevent structural adjustment programmes from having a negative impact in the social field and from unfavourably affecting the most vulnerable groups in society.

He invited the agency representatives to provide guidance on how to ensure that actions to eradicate poverty reached the poorest segments of society, since they were not always easy to reach. He also wondered what different strategies were required in order to reach different groups of the poor and what practical measures had proved most effective. Further information on the experience and progress of the various organizations in conceptualizing and implementing programmes to combat poverty would be most welcome.

He hoped that the recently established UNCTAD Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation would make a valuable contribution to the evaluation of policies and experience and the initiation of action-oriented programmes. The Committee should cooperate closely with the United Nations, the specialized agencies and Governments.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) welcomed the recognition by many speakers of the need for United Nations country anti-poverty strategies that encompassed all relevant United Nations agencies and programmes. Such strategies would help avoid duplication in the field and facilitate relations between Governments and the development community. Non-governmental organizations, which often were at the cutting edge of new approaches to poverty alleviation, also should be involved in devising the strategies, and he was pleased that other speakers had expressed similar views. Lastly, he would like to hear the views of the agencies on how to foster popular participation in the alleviation of poverty.

Mr. CHAMBERS (International Labour Organisation) said that the United Kingdom representative had drawn an important distinction between action at the Headquarters level and action at the country level. Those responses definitely had to be differentiated. Furthermore, the agencies must be responsive to instructions from the General Assembly which, in its resolution 44/211, had made it abundantly clear that the responsibility for coordinating all anti-poverty action rested with Governments. He emphasized very strongly that the success of any integrated poverty-alleviation strategies and coordination efforts on the part of the United Nations and its agencies required the strong support of Governments.

With regard to the establishment of focal points within the agencies to deal with poverty, he stressed that the simple act of designating them would do nothing to resolve the problems of coordination, conceptualization or implementation. If Governments identified poverty eradication as a priority, they should instruct the agencies to devise programmes which were endowed with adequate intellectual and financial resources.

As to the role of non-governmental organizations, he underscored the importance of ensuring that their activities were closely coordinated at the country level and corresponded with the recipient country's priorities.

Mr. STOBY (Director, Economic and Social Council Affairs and Inter-Agency Coordination Division) noted that the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/47) highlighted the problems to be addressed as well as gaps in the existing coordination mechanism. He invited delegations to comment on the points raised in the report with a view to the formulation of recommendations and guidelines. The report fully recognized the great need for a system-wide poverty-eradication strategy, and he urged delegations to comment in particular on the suggestions contained in paragraphs 113, 114, 116 and 117 of the report.

Mr. ORLIANGE (France) said that, in elaborating a strategy to combat poverty and considering the desirability of designating focal points, or poverty coordinators, it was essential to avoid an excessively narrow approach. While activities designed specifically to combat poverty could be useful, it was imperative to take into account the underlying causes of poverty, which was a result of both underdevelopment and development gone awry.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) acknowledged that it was difficult for the United Nations system to respond to General Assembly resolution 44/211 because some Governments were unable to draw up clear and coordinated poverty-alleviation strategies. Nevertheless, it was also the responsibility of the United Nations system to try to ensure that national strategies were sound and coordinated. The United Nations system should provide an integrated response to such strategies and change the current situation where Governments often dealt with the agencies concerned on an individual basis.

Mr. BHATIA (International Monetary Fund) said that, in view of the specific nature of poverty in each country, a formalized system of coordination for the various agencies was likely to prove unproductive. The United Nations system should help countries draw up their individual poverty-alleviation strategies and determine how it could help them. While coordination was necessary, the approach should be kept as flexible and informal as possible.

Mr. RASHIDI (Morocco) said that requests made to the United Nations system for financing poverty alleviation programmes were drawn up by government officials, who had a technocratic approach to development, rather than a participatory one. The United Nations system had to respect the priorities of Governments, but if a Government had no poverty-alleviation strategy, the system could not be expected to take action itself, unless that Government was obliged to implement programmes called for by the General Assembly in which the agencies had specific tasks in certain fields.

Mr. PAULINICH (Peru) said that it was clear from the discussion that poverty eradication was one of the most important priorities of the specialized agencies. He stressed the need for flexibility in improving coordination in poverty eradication and cautioned against establishing mandatory rules to be applied by all agencies. The existing system of coordination should be made more effective, while ensuring the necessary flexibility for tackling specific poverty-related problems in individual countries. Since the causes of poverty were deep-seated and multifarious, poverty could not be eradicated merely through improved coordination. Coordination should therefore aim at finding solutions to specific problems.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) stressed that the United Nations system could be very effective when it worked in a coordinated way. It was widely recognized by countries that United Nations expertise was very relevant to national strategies. It would be interesting to learn how the specialized agencies dealt with national bureaucracies in order to reach the most impoverished groups and ensure popular participation in alleviating poverty.

Mr. URZUA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) stressed the need to ensure that coordination was flexible and adaptable to different political circumstances. The major task at the country level was to define poverty-eradication programmes with the participation of government bodies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The expertise of all the relevant specialized agencies should be available for such programmes, and the responsibilites of each agency should be clearly defined. Above all, it was necessary to ensure coordination and a division of labour at the country level and at the same time maintain channels of communication with agency headquarters and regional offices to establish a broad framework for dealing with the problems encountered.

Mr. EDGREN (United Nations Development Programme) said that even in cases where Governments did not have poverty alleviation strategies or there was bureaucratic resistance to a campaign against poverty, there was always something that the United Nations system could do. In some countries primary education would lead to structural changes in the future. Agencies could work with non-governmental organizations to promote political empowerment and the participation of various groups which would then seek to bring about structural changes. It was essential to have a clear, long-term strategy. Over an extended period of time, resistance would weaken and political and economic changes would come about. Lastly, he stressed the need to focus on individual national situations, no two of which were exactly alike.

Mr. ALTESMAN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF had jointly drawn up a proposal for strengthened collaborative United Nations system efforts to help address poverty. The proposal focused on common country strategies; more effective links with the Bretton Woods institutions; more effective links among the operational, the research and the

(Mr. Altesman)

regional capacities of the United Nations system; monitoring of progress and official development assistance; and implementation of internationally agreed-upon goals and strategies. In each area there would be specific proposals on how to proceed further.

Mr. CHAMBERS (International Labour Organisation) said that he agreed entirely with the United Kingdom representative that it was the responsibility of the United Nations system to assist Governments. Nevertheless, that was a two-way process. If a Government made an effort to coordinate poverty alleviation, the United Nations system must do the same with regard to its own components. There were a number of ways in which the poor could be involved in strategies. Non-governmental women's organizations, for example, could be asked to identify specific problem areas and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes in carrying out basic development tasks. Although solutions for one group of poor people might be completely inappropriate for another, it was possible at the national level and through coordinated programming approaches in the United Nations system to involve the intended beneficiaries. In Latin America, for example, a fund was to be set up for indigenous peoples, in which they would define their own development needs and priorities. It was necessary to ensure participation by the poor in planning and conceptualization so that some of the egregious errors made in the past at the country level could be avoided.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) said that when Governments were unable to draw up a coordinated and clear poverty-alleviation strategy, it was due to lack of capacity rather than ill will. Accordingly, where there was no national strategy, it was a primary responsibility of the United Nations system to build the necessary national capacity to help Governments elaborate coordination strategies. The primary function of much of the work of the specialized agencies was national capacity-building.

Mr. EDGREN (United Nations Development Programme), introducing the proposal by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF for strengthened collaborative United Nations system efforts to help address poverty, said that the objective was to take country-level coordination several steps further by broadening the participation of the United Nations agencies in countries where Governments

(Mr. Edgren)

wanted them to undertake such work. The idea was to further systematize the monitoring of development assistance and the implementation of agreed goals and strategies relating to poverty in order to formulate general objectives for poverty eradication.

Mrs. BEKELE (World Health Organization) said that all the specialized agencies were very aware that one of their primary responsibilities was capacity-building. It was also important to help poor countries build the necessary infrastructure in order to be able to sustain development activities.

Mr. RASHIDI (Morocco) noted that there had been much discussion of deficiencies on the part of recipient Governments and shortcomings in the United Nations system. Consideration should also be given to the fact that only 6.5 per cent of bilateral official development assistance went to human development. When such assistance was given, there was always some sort of conditionality. If there must be conditionality, it should benefit the poor.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 10 July 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

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Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme:

(a) Assistance in the eradication of poverty and support to vulnerable groups, including assistance during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME:

(a) ASSISTANCE IN THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ASSISTANCE DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES (continued) (E/1992/27, 47)

Mr. HADDAD (World Bank) said that sustainable poverty reduction, as the primary objective of the World Bank, could be achieved through sustainable economic growth, investment in people and protection of the environment. The Bank had recently issued a Poverty Reduction Handbook on poverty-reduction strategies, "good-practice" operational approaches, analytical and lending instruments, measuring and monitoring, and experience of coordination.

There seemed to be a consensus on the strategies for poverty reduction; the so-called conflict between growth and poverty reduction had been resolved and the potential conflict between environmental and poverty concerns had been well handled at the recent United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. What was now needed was collaboration in the implementation of strategies. There had been considerable coordination within and without the United Nations system, and significant experience had been accumulated.

Seven principles and mechanisms for collaboration on poverty reduction had emerged from the World Bank's own experience: firstly, coordination should be at the country level, and firmly grounded in country-specific analysis; secondly, collaboration should ensure linkages between poverty-reduction measures and macroeconomic policies; thirdly, collaboration should include bilateral donors, multilateral agencies, development banks and non-governmental organizations; fourthly, collaboration should be based on comparative advantages and should make up for institutional limitations; fifthly, in many instances collaboration on a country poverty-alleviation

(Mr. Haddad, World Bank)

programme required concerted long-term support, not just for capital expenditure, but also for recurrent expenditure in order to ensure sustainability and to minimize fiscal risks when external support came to an end; sixthly, coordination, to be sustained, must be nourished at working institutional levels; and seventhly, extensive use should be made of such coordination mechanisms as consultative groups and round tables, workshops for in-depth exchange of information, co-financing and parallel financing, project implementation and technical assistance.

Success in reducing poverty ultimately depended on a country's commitment, policies, domestic resources and income. Any inter-agency coordination should therefore support country efforts, and the World Bank was determined to work still more closely with its partners in that endeavour.

Mr. BHATIA (International Monetary Fund) said that the need for close collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions, especially IMF, and the other agencies of the United Nations system, arose from recognition that, firstly, individual country-adjustment programmes, to be sustainable, must give due regard to social and sectoral aspects, especially poverty eradication, while individual social and sectoral development projects would also be sustainable only in the context of macroeconomic stability; and that secondly, in the social and sectoral fields, the other agencies had a comparative manpower and technical advantage over the Bretton Woods institutions.

The conclusions of the joint 1990 seminar organized with the participation of IMF and other United Nations agencies, to which the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development had referred in his statement, had fostered increasing interaction between the agencies and IMF. As a result, country programmes had been enriched, and now contained a wide spectrum of social and sectoral policy measures and projects in which the United Nations system could assist national authorities within an agreed, internationally supported, macroeconomic policy framework. Pending further restructuring of the United Nations system, the framework of collaboration outlined at the seminar provided practical modalities for strengthened collaboration and reflected many of the concerns and suggestions advanced

(Mr. Bhatia, IMF)

during the current discussions. He therefore wondered whether it was useful to request the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) itself to elaborate such modalities.

The emphasis on field-level coordination and on the role of the resident coordinator was correct, but that only ensured "external" coordination and would not necessarily ensure the inclusion of appropriate projects within the country programme. There was a need to "internalize" that process, which in turn required capacity-building at the ministries and agencies level within each country. The United Nations system could be useful in that process, which would also help to integrate sectoral inputs into overall policy formulation.

In conclusion, he drew attention to some inevitable handicaps hindering inter-agency collaboration, namely a tendency to look inward rather than to other agencies for prompt action, different paces of work cycles, resource constraints, the difficulty of reconciling unconditional and conditional grant and loan operations in formulating programmes, the multiplicity of United Nations funds and programmes, and differing philosophies as to the appropriate adjustment policies. No formal mechanisms would overcome those hurdles, but pragmatic interaction between the various institutions through informal contacts would be of benefit.

Mr. JAZAIRY (President, International Fund for Agricultural Development) said that two aspects of the growth in absolute poverty in the developing world were of particular concern: the first was the deteriorating situation regarding poverty and hunger in sub-Saharan Africa, and the second was the fact that in coming years most of the additional rural poor were likely to be women. Such a challenge would require coordinated and determined action by all United Nations agencies in partnership with the States concerned, based on a shared approach to poverty alleviation.

Conventional approaches in the past had tended to regard the poor primarily as the object of welfare or the beneficiaries of the "trickle-down" effect of aggregate growth. In fact the poor made a substantial contribution: for example, smallholders, especially women, accounted for the bulk of food production in many developing countries. Given proper policies

(Mr. Jazairy, IFAD)

and incentives, the underutilized capacity of the poor could be made into a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it.

One adverse factor was the cycle of external disasters, such as drought, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Emergency assistance, rather than funding for rehabilitation and desertification control, had been the easier option in recent years, but would not of itself reduce vulnerability to climatic hazards. In recognition of that fact, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) had launched, in 1986, the first regionally specific programme to help combat drought and desertification in Africa, mobilizing $300 million in additional resources. Those funds had financed projects for combining crop-intensification to meet immediate needs with longer-term steps to promote resilience to drought and enhance the environment. In 1991, IFAD member States had decided to continue the programme into a second phase, which it was hoped would generate a further $300 million. Pledges totalling approximately $90 million had already been received from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Kuwait and Nigeria. The support of the Economic and Social Council had also played an important part in the success achieved during the first phase. However, an unprecedented drought in southern Africa underscored the need for generous contributions to the second phase, and he hoped that the Council would issue a strong appeal for additional contributions.

IFAD had also given attention to the role of rural women in combating hunger, and had therefore supported the initiative taken by a number of First Ladies in organizing a unique World Summit for the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, held earlier in the year at Geneva. Similar Summits of First Ladies were planned at the regional level. Implementation of the Declaration adopted at the Geneva Summit would change the lives of hundreds of millions of impoverished rural women and contribute substantially to reducing global poverty and hunger. The text of the Declaration had been submitted to the Council in the form of a resolution sponsored by a number of countries whose First Ladies had participated. For its part, IFAD would devote itself to translating the Declaration into action at the field level in its project design and implementation.

Mr. PETERS (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that each day in recent months some 10,000 new refugees had been forced to flee their homes, and worldwide refugee numbers had doubled since the 1980s, currently standing at some 17 million. Most were women and children, and over 80 per cent were in the developing world. Large numbers were also returning to their countries of origin, notably Afghanistan and Cambodia, and there were prospects for large-scale repatriation in the near future in many other parts of the world. In many cases, refugees were returning to countries devastated by years of conflict, and large-scale rehabilitation assistance was often one of the prerequisites for their durable reintegration.

Against that background, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had tried to play a catalytic role in promoting awareness of refugee problems among development agencies and funding institutions, and in encouraging the inclusion of activities to benefit refugees, returnees and displaced persons in the mainstream of development planning. Sustainable development was important in solving refugee situations or preventing their emergence.

The pressures generated by massive influxes of refugees in developing countries and by the increased movement of migrants towards the industrialized world had led the international community to place greater emphasis on preventing refugee flows and on solving existing refugee problems, notably through repatriation. Naturally, the extent to which the twin objectives of solution and prevention could be achieved often depended on political factors and initiatives, but it also required the willingness of individual Governments, the United Nations system and the international community as a whole to eliminate the causes of departure, to prepare the ground for repatriation and to ensure proper reintegration.

Many refugees would be returning to communities in which extreme poverty prevailed, and unless their return was accompanied by comprehensive development programmes, they might undermine prospects for reconciliation and for political and economic recovery.

(Mr. Peters)

One obstacle to effective reintegration was the gap separating UNHCR short-term assistance from more extensive rehabilitation and development aid furnished by other agencies. A more systematic linkage between refugee or returnee aid and development assistance was needed if repatriation was to constitute a truly durable solution. Despite significant progress made in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other agencies, the responsibilities of agencies at the various stages of the relief and development process still required further clarification.

Given the close interrelationship between the political, economic and social factors causing refugees, development aid and poverty reduction were crucial to any preventive strategy. In many developing countries, democratization and development were fragile, and economic deprivation could easily arouse political and intercommunal tension and armed conflict which, in turn, generated refugees. Only a long-term economic strategy could address the problems of underdevelopment and the vicious circle of poverty and violence. Nevertheless, carefully targeted development assistance with an emphasis on priority human needs clearly had a role to play in mitigating and removing the root causes of migratory and refugee movements, and in the reintegration of returnees. In particular, increased resources must be channelled into improving the access of the impoverished to basic services and to sustainable development at the community level, and it was to be hoped that a significant proportion of the funds freed by the end of cold war confrontation could be harnessed for that purpose.

Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that poverty was an intolerable burden for one billion people in Asia, Africa and Latin America. His delegation welcomed the recognition of the problem at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and its inclusion in Agenda 21. Any attempt to tackle poverty-related issues must be based on country-specific programmes complemented by international initiatives. It was to be hoped that the resources released by the end of the cold war could be used to combat poverty and its attendant misery.

The United Nations must formulate a specific strategy to deal with poverty and promote sustainable development, along the lines indicated in

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

Agenda 21. The key to such an approach lay in providing individuals with sustainable means of existence. That would require integrated job-creation and income-promotion strategies in disadvantaged regions. Governments must increase their investments in human capital among every vulnerable segment of society through a range of sectoral interventions, for which major resources would be required.

The attainment of sustainable development, and hence the elimination of poverty, required widespread participation in development activities and in decision-making. The living conditions of women, in particular, must be improved. Attention should also be focused on children's issues. In that connection, Benin welcomed the inclusion of poverty by UNDP in its fifth programming cycle as one of the Programme's six major priorities, based on the strengthening of national development capacities. His delegation also commended the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for its monitoring of food availability in developing countries. Greater support should be given to UNHCR in assisting populations driven from their homes by conflict or extreme poverty.

His delegation welcomed the recognition at the current session of the imperative need for massive efforts to eliminate poverty and of the appropriateness of policies which would enable the poor to attain a decent standard of living. The focus on hunger, the need to integrate women into development and the formulation of emergency measures to protect vulnerable segments of society were also of note.

While structural adjustment programmes no doubt benefited the economies of the countries concerned, they frequently entailed harsh social consequences for the most vulnerable segments of society. The attention devoted by the specialized agencies to the negative impact of macroeconomic adjustments on living conditions by the specialized agencies augured well. Structural adjustment programmes had frequently disrupted the availability of resources for education, health and social security, often vital to the vulnerable segments of society. In many African countries, moreover, the ranks of the impoverished had been swollen by former employees of State enterprises, compelled to seek new employment in the wake of structural adjustment policies.

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

His delegation supported the Secretary-General's appeal for the more rational use of resources and greater coherence in executing activities, and endorsed the means of combating poverty suggested in Agenda 21. Lastly, he trusted that the current session would lead to real action to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

Mr. NANDOE (Suriname) said that there was growing concern at the extent of structural poverty and the increasing numbers of poor people in the developing countries, estimated at more than one billion. To meet their needs, food production, industrial output and energy use would need to increase tremendously. Further, the UNDP Human Development Report, 1992 indicated that the disparities between rich and poor were widening. Developing countries were unequal partners in the world market, which generally benefited the stronger, developed economies. Even where the developing countries had a competitive advantage, market rules were often changed to prevent open competition.

Social deprivation remained widespread in the developing world. Nearly half the children in rural areas were not protected against communicable diseases, while some two thirds of families were without safe drinking water or adequate sanitation. On the basis of current trends, the children - especially girls - of the poorest 20 per cent of families were not likely to become literate. Furthermore, structural adjustment measures in many cases might have disproportionately hurt the poor in terms of declining health, education and living standards.

The United Nations should make poverty eradication a major priority. To that end, efforts should be made to provide social safety nets when the poor could not generate enough income to escape from absolute poverty. Their access to such basic services as health and housing must be improved. Further, policies must be promoted that would give them access to productive assets.

A global action programme on poverty alleviation was needed, with a serious review of the issue in time for the proposed 1995 world summit for social development.

Mr. MONTAÑO (Mexico) said that a fifth of mankind lived in conditions such that their basic needs for food, health and housing remained unmet. The enormous resources devoted in earlier decades to confrontation must now be reoriented towards the solution of priority issues such as poverty. The alleviation of poverty could be tackled only within a comprehensive approach at the international level, with the establishment of an environment conducive to development. Macroeconomic decisions were of the utmost importance. The impact of poverty had worsened in Latin America in recent years as a result of drastic structural adjustment programmes imposed by the need to meet financial commitments stemming from external indebtedness. Neglect of the social element had engendered a serious deterioration in standards of living.

An open and fair trading system was of decisive importance. The incomes of the developing countries largely depended on the openness of international markets to their products. Paradoxically, just when many developing countries were opening up their markets, protectionism was on the rise in the advanced countries. The limited progress made in the Uruguay Round was disquieting: should the negotiations fail, the fight against poverty would suffer accordingly.

Given the close link between impoverished societies and weak democracies, one of the best defences for democracy was to eliminate extreme poverty. Yet the international community had not taken the requisite action. In addition to macroeconomic reform, there must be an increase in official development assistance. Although the United Nations system was becoming increasingly involved in the campaign against poverty, the effectiveness of its activities depended on coordination. The multilateral financial institutions and the regional commissions should increase their involvement.

For its part, Mexico had established a national solidarity programme to assist the poor. It encompassed social welfare, employment opportunities and development of productive capacities, as well as regional infrastructure projects benefiting the community. The programme relied on individual and communal initiatives, participation in all programme activities, and co-responsibility. It sought to promote social mobilization of the poor. No

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

bureaucratic apparatus had been created; existing structures had been employed. In practical terms, the programme amounted to a cluster of investment projects financed from varied sources. Such a cooperative approach between social groups and the Government had expanded the arsenal available in the fight against poverty. High priority had been given to health and primary education. Solidarity committees had been established in urban and rural communities throughout the country, providing a wide range of services to millions of Mexicans.

The increase in poverty in Latin America was largely attributable to factors beyond its control, such as slow world growth. Nearly half the population of Latin America and the Caribbean lived in extreme poverty. In an effort to initiate a regional response, Mexico had proposed that the Organization of American States should convene a special assembly in 1993.

It had become clear at the current session that the specialized agencies had already begun to devote a good part of their efforts to the fight against poverty, but the problem was so vast that no real progress was possible without optimum coordination. As yet there was no global strategy on the elimination of poverty. Any strategy that emerged would call for compromise and joint action on a comprehensive basis. An international environment propitious to economic growth and an open and fair trading system were essential in such a scenario.

Ms. POLLACK (United States of America) said that the most effective way to alleviate poverty would be to create conditions conducive to gainful employment and to ensure the efficient allocation of resources while fostering entrepreneurship and the private sector. Success had been achieved by some East Asian countries in that regard. Experience had shown that complex programmes beyond a country's capacity to implement did not succeed.

Effective coordination depended on a flow of information throughout the United Nations system and its States, not simply cataloguing recent appraisals, useful as such details were, but providing the results of system-wide evaluation exercises. Greater efforts were also needed to draw lessons from past programmes. As the representative of the World Bank had said, those activities would be particularly useful if carried out at the

(Ms. Pollack, United States)

individual country level. Policies and programmes to alleviate poverty must also aim to enhance the role of women; the reports presented by the Secretary-General and the various agencies were sadly lacking in that regard, and it would be useful to hear what action the agencies were taking. Her delegation would also like the heads of the specialized agencies to indicate how they thought collaboration could be improved.

The Secretary-General had noted, in his report (E/1992/47) that no system-wide anti-poverty strategy existed; her delegation shared the view, however, that such a system would not be useful. It was important to focus coordination efforts on the country level, integrating Governments into the development activities of the system. But field activity alone was inadequate, and could lead to neglect of headquarters responsibility for coordination and of central funding questions. With regard to the latter, system-wide coordination of funds was essential; indeed, discussion of coordination with no mention of funding might be seen as a wish to avoid a meaningful approach.

Popular participation, too, was essential to any programmes to alleviate poverty. A corollary of that was good governance; in that connection, it would be useful to appraise the record of countries whose poverty-eradication programmes had been most successful. The agencies might also wish to consider how to embody such assessments in their coordination efforts.

Mr. NORDMANN (Observer for Switzerland) welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (E/1992/47) as a first step towards improving coordination within the United Nations system. His country had always supported efforts to assist the most disadvantaged countries and encouraged the activities undertaken to that end by the various United Nations bodies. Given the extremely complex nature of the fight against poverty and the vast range of actors involved, improved coordination was vital. However, it was essential to recognize the influence of other factors which were highly political in nature, such as income distribution, social structures, and different visions of society, and to acknowledge the limits of international cooperation by comparison with the role played by individual societies in the developing countries.

(Mr. Nordmann, Observer, Switzerland)

While supporting efforts to improve circulation of information both within and outside the system, he stressed the need to draw on the vast experience acquired over the years both by the various agencies and by the developing countries themselves. That experience had not been fully utilized in devising more appropriate and better coordinated measures in the field which would be of more direct benefit to the developing countries in helping them to take charge of their own development. A critical qualitative assessment of past experience could serve as a practical tool for the international community and provide fresh impetus for future actions.

He welcomed the mechanisms for inter-institutional consultation and cooperation introduced by ACC and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), as well as the enhanced dialogue between the Bretton Woods institutions and other bodies within the United Nations system. He also commended the emphasis placed on human development and social policy in the statement by the Director-General of IMF and hoped that the current debate would help pave the way for the proposed world summit for social development.

Mr. BIN MOMEN (Bangladesh) said that a large number of developing countries, including his own, had undertaken macroeconomic structural adjustment, with mixed results and uneven impact in the various groups of the population. Such policies must take fully into account the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, and could not succeed without a favourable international climate in the fields of resources, trade, market access, debt reduction and technology transfer.

The developing countries, with their inadequate infrastructure and institutions, faced an extremely difficult task, and the United Nations system could greatly help them by providing a coherent, coordinated and simplified approach to cooperation. In that regard, his delegation appreciated the important role played by JCGP and ACC in system-wide coordination, particularly in regard to rural development.

Full use should be made of national institutions and their capacities enhanced. Since any poverty-eradication programme was a multi-sectoral package, it was essential for all agencies to have a focused and coordinated

(Mr. Bin Momen, Bangladesh)

approach, especially at the field level, and in that connection the resident coordinator system was a valuable tool which could be further strengthened.

The needs of the least developed countries should be accorded special attention, and the Programme of Action adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

In Bangladesh a large number of non-governmental organizations were supplementing the Government's efforts in poverty-eradication programmes, but there was room for wider outreach and greater cost-effectiveness in programme delivery.

Man-made and natural disasters also played a part in reducing the poor to the level of absolute poverty. Accordingly, long-term development, including poverty eradication, was closely linked to disaster control and management, and the establishment of the new Department of Humanitarian Affairs would be greatly welcomed in countries such as Bangladesh which were particularly liable to natural disasters.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, welcomed the joint paper provided by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA in response to delegations' earlier requests for comments, and regretted that no other agencies had yet replied. During the current useful dialogue there had been welcome stress on the need to meet national requirements, promote national capacity-building and strive for an integrated response by the United Nations system to individual countries' needs. He requested UNDP to indicate what specific methods it used in order to promote national strategies to alleviate poverty and to improve coordination for that purpose. He also asked whether UNCTAD could say how its new Committee on Poverty Alleviation sought effective inputs to its deliberations from the rest of the United Nations system. He would also welcome word from any agencies about the steps they were taking to ensure the adequate involvement of non-governmental organizations at headquarters level. Lastly, he urged all to take advantage of the current opportunity for full and frank debate.

Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden) noted that the representatives of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA had referred, in their joint paper, to common country strategies. An integrated approach was, of course, important; but the issue was not simply about coordination but also about roles and mandates, the need being to avoid duplication. He had some doubts about the idea that ACC should be requested to develop modalities for monitoring activities; it might be better to use those already existing. He agreed that close links between analytical and operational capacities were important; there again, however, the need for a better division of labour was clear, and he felt that a suitably strengthened Secretariat could and should play a greater role in the analytical and strategic aspects.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) referred to the text mentioned by the previous speaker, and to the suggestion that ACC should be requested to develop modalities. The Development Assistance Committee of OECD had long been carrying out studies to monitor progress and flows of official development assistance (ODA); it was important, in that regard, for the United Nations system to guard against using resources to produce information obtainable elsewhere. He also noted that no agency had yet responded to his earlier request for suggestions on how the United Nations system could help to enhance popular participation in activities to alleviate poverty.

Mr. KAARIA (Finland) said that, in monitoring progress and the provision of ODA, the focus should be on the priority given, in national budgets, to helping the poorest sectors of the community. In that connection, a distinction should perhaps be made between the application of national resources and that of ODA; the former could be more usefully applied to direct poverty-alleviation programmes, and the latter, which would contain foreign-currency and technical components, targeted longer-term aspects such as investment and education. In other words, ODA should be seen as a catalyst enabling Governments to release national resources for more direct action. He agreed however that, for the latter type of activity, the funds of United Nations agencies could be applied also. Statistics to show the proportion of ODA currently applied to human development would be useful.

Mr. GARELIK (Russian Federation) said that the current discussion reflected a growing recognition of the need for a clear understanding of the respective responsibilities of Governments and United Nations bodies in the task of alleviating poverty. His delegation would like to see a review of priorities and policies for the 1990s, from two standpoints. Firstly, with regard to the allocation of resources, he endorsed the comments made by the representative of UNICEF regarding the greater involvement of donors. Secondly, Governments themselves should consider the allocation of national resources as a matter of priority, bearing in mind the current opportunities for reductions in military expenditure. It was also important, as many previous speakers had noted, that recipient Governments should, in view of limitations to international funding, ensure the most effective use of their own resources. Previous speakers had rightly stressed the multifaceted nature of the problem of poverty and the need to ensure that action to alleviate it provided the utmost support for the most vulnerable groups of society. In that connection, the situation of countries in transition had received inadequate attention.

His delegation welcomed the growing cooperation between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions, as instanced by the cooperation between UNDP and the World Bank in measures to take account of the social aspects of structural adjustment programmes. An increased IMF involvement in that regard was essential.

The joint reply submitted by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA was a good example of a joint approach on priority issues. He stressed the desirability of developing a unified strategy, and supported the idea of the leadership role of resident coordinators in field work.

The Secretariat's summary of the discussions provided a useful outline of the deliberations on the issue of coordination. In that regard, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean had referred to a forthcoming regional conference on poverty; the other regional commissions and bodies of the United Nations system should follow the proceedings of that forum and study its recommendations. With regard to the need for specialized system-wide machinery to coordinate action to alleviate

(Mr. Garelik, Russian Federation)

poverty, his delegation, too, had some doubts; the possibilities afforded by ACC's structure, and the joint work of ACC and the Committee for Programme and Coordination, should be borne in mind.

Mr. JAZAIRY (President, International Fund for Agricultural Development) said that a number of previous speakers had mentioned the issue of complementarity between the macroeconomic approach of the World Bank and the activities of the agencies which constituted the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP). But it should not be overlooked that a solely macroeconomic approach could be self-defeating; a system-wide approach at grass-roots level was needed. Had IFAD been able to contribute to the response paper submitted by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, it would have pointed out that the entire JCGP membership was already giving priority to that aspect. For example, some two months previously IFAD had hosted a meeting of all the institutional heads and had established country teams, representing all the institutions concerned, to analyse the grass-roots situation in Malawi, the Philippines, Yemen, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Namibia. Studies relating to the first three had already been completed.

Popular participation was, of course, the key to the design of any programme and to its credibility. The involvement of local non-governmental organizations was vital in that regard. So too was proper attention to the role of women. Many past programmes had been frustrated because of failure to recognize the status and contribution of women in a country's social and economic life. Indeed, the issue was not about "integration" but recognition of the impact of women's existing share in activities. In recent years their role had further increased owing to conflicts and natural disasters, as a result of which the number of households headed by women had increased to over 30 per cent of the total in Africa, for example. Such facts, and the issues they raised, must be reflected in any strategy.

Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) welcomed the commitment of the agencies to help poverty eradication and agreed with the President of IFAD that pragmatic coordination was required not only within the United Nations system but also between agencies and donor countries in order to avoid policy conflicts.

(Mr. Guerrero, Philippines)

Governments should bear the main responsibility for broad policy outlines, but it was vital to ensure that strategies were drawn up in parallel with international aid programmes. It was also vital that Governments should not be bullied by donor countries into accepting measures they did not endorse.

He agreed with the representative of Finland that a balance needed to be struck between long-term and short-term programmes, particularly in the case of training and education, where results could not be expected immediately.

Many developing countries did not have sophisticated planning systems and emphasis needed to be placed on national capacity-building. It was not a question of spoonfeeding, but of helping Governments to help themselves by providing them with the appropriate techniques.

Finally, poverty eradication was not just a matter of altruism since the benefits it would bring in the form of security, peace and income-generation would be of value to all.

Mr. BERTHELOT (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), replying to a question by the representative of the United Kingdom, said that the newly established Committee on Poverty Alleviation would be meeting for the first time in January 1993, when it would draw up a detailed programme of work. Before that date, the Secretariat would be preparing a note on the work programme in consultation with all the relevant agencies. In addition, an inter-agency meeting would be held in November 1992, when efforts would be made to identify possible shortcomings in the system, with particular reference to the need for an integrated approach, balance between national and international considerations and the need to take account of the situation in countries in transition. In replying to a question asked at a previous meeting by the representative of Japan, he explained that the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational) (CCQS (OPS)) was engaged in activities at both national and headquarters level. It had established guidelines on the operational implications of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, setting out the goals advocated as priorities by the various agencies within the system. It had asked agency country representatives to cooperate in devising country-specific strategies, for which coordination at both national and

(Mr. Berthelot)

headquarters level was necessary. CCSQ (OPS) intended to contribute to those strategies and a document was being drawn up with the aid of the World Bank and certain JCGB bodies which would be discussed in September 1992.

Mr. SALL (United Nations Development Programme), replying to a question by the United Kingdom representative concerning national capacity-building, said that poverty eradication had been a UNDP priority since decision 1990/34 had been adopted by the UNDP Governing Council. The decision stipulated that human development was to be the main goal of all UNDP activities, and it identified national capacity-building as one way of achieving that goal and singled out six priority areas in which capacity-building needed to be developed. On the question of how national capacity was to be created or developed, he cited the joint initiatives by JCGP referred to by the President of IFAD, and noted that UNDP had launched several other similar initiatives involving countries such as Rwanda, Pakistan and China.

UNDP had also sought to promote the capacity of developing countries to devise their own strategies, by promoting national meetings aimed at identifying the most significant local indicators and gathering relevant local data.

In reply to the question by the representative of Canada concerning the promotion of participation in development by local populations, he pointed out that UNDP Governing Council decision 1990/34 had emphasized that popular participation was a vital element of poverty eradication. UNDP had embarked on a staff training policy at all levels to increase awareness of the problems involved in such participation. It was also developing a series of initiatives financed from extrabudgetary resources, such as the Africa 2000 Network, funded by Canada, France, Norway, Japan and Denmark, which was helping communities at grass-roots level to safeguard their environment. Because such programmes were funded from extrabudgetary resources, no authority was required from the Governments concerned. However, Governments were always consulted since it was felt that the best way of encouraging participation was not by playing off non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

(Mr. Sall)

against Government structures, but by offering examples of successful projects in which both parties played a role.

Mrs. WARZAZI (Morocco) said that a paper had been circulated which purported to summarize the Council's debates on the item, but which gave undue weight to certain points of view at the expense of others. She called on the President to explain the source and status of the document.

The PRESIDENT explained that the document in question was a "non-paper" drawn up by the Secretariat for his own personal use and had no official status. Some delegations had asked for the document to be circulated and he had acceded to that request. He agreed that the document contained contradictions and might be considered ambiguous. He would ask the Secretariat to revise the document in order to reflect the debates more fully.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.